

**Polish Diplomacy 1914–1945:  
Aims and Achievements**

*The Third M. B. Grabowski Memorial Lecture*

**POLISH DIPLOMACY 1914–1945:  
AIMS AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

**A Lecture**

**in English  
and Polish**

**PIOTR WANDYCZ**

**Together with a bibliographical essay  
on works dealing with recent  
Polish diplomatic history**

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Keith Sword**

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INTRODUCTION  
POLISH DIPLOMACY, 1914-1945. AIMS AND ACHIEVEMENTS  
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

Norman Davies  
*Introduction*  
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Piotr S. Wandycz  
*Polish Diplomacy, 1914-1945. Aims and Achievements*  
*Bibliographical Essay*  
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Foreword

On 21 October, 1987 Professor Piotr Wandycz, Professor of History at Yale University, delivered the third in the series of M.B. Grabowski Memorial Lectures in Chancellor's Hall, Senate House. Professor Norman Davies, Professor of Polish History at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, was in the Chair. The Lecture was made possible thanks to the generosity of the M.B. Grabowski Fund.

This volume contains the English and Polish texts of the Memorial Lecture, together with a bibliographical essay by Professor Wandycz, which provides a critical review of works dealing with Polish diplomatic history during the period covered by the Lecture. Professor Davies' introduction to the Lecture has been added as a preface.

The Editor would like to thank both Mrs Irena Eile for translating the Lecture into Polish and Maria Korzeniewicz-Davies for translating the Introduction into Polish. Thanks also go to the M.B. Grabowski Fund for a grant towards the printing of this book.

### Biographical note

PIOTR WANDYCZ was born in Kraków (Poland) in 1923. During the war he served in the Polish Army in the West as a second lieutenant. He studied at the Université de Grenoble (1941–42); Cambridge University (BA, 1948; MA, 1952); the London School of Economics and Political Science (Ph.D., 1951) and at the College d'Europe, Bruges.

Since 1951 he has been resident in the United States. He has taught the History of East Central Europe at Indiana University (1954–66) and at Yale University (from 1966 to the present), where he is currently Professor of History. He has been Visiting Professor at the University of Columbia in 1967, 1969 and 1975, and is currently a Guggenheim Foundation Fellow and a Fellow of the Russian Research Centre, Harvard.

Among his academic honours, Professor Wandycz was awarded the George L. Beer Prize of the American Historical Association for the best book in international history to appear in 1962. He is also a past recipient of the Jurzykowski Foundation Award and the J. Piłsudski Institute Prize. He is the author of ten books including: *France and her Eastern Allies* (1962), *Twilight of French Eastern Alliances* (1988), *Soviet-Polish Relations* (1969), *Lands of Partitioned Poland* (1974 and 1984), *The United States and Poland* (1980) and, in Polish, *August Zaleski* (1980), *Polska a zagranica* (1986).

In addition he is a member of the editorial board of the following journals: *Slavic Review*, *International History Review*, *Niepodległość* and of the book series *Przeszłość i Terażniejszość* (Paris).

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## Introduction to the Lecture

Chancellor's Hall,  
Senate House,  
University of London.

12 October 1987

My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen,

45 years ago, in the late autumn of 1942, when England was rejoicing in the news from El Alamein, a British military transport plane took off from Portugal, and landed at an air station near Bristol. It was carrying, among others, a Polish Government official and his family, who had recently made their way through Spain from Vichy France. The son of the family, then 19 years old, had just completed a period of study at the University of Grenoble, and was heading for the Polish Army in Scotland where he was later commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the First (Armoured) Division of General Stanisław Maczek. That young student and soldier, of almost half a century ago, is our distinguished guest today.

(...)

Piotr Stefan Wandycz was born in 1923 in Kraków. But he grew up, and went to school in the great city of Lwów, which, he feels, more than anywhere, to have been his Polish home. After leaving Poland in the first weeks of the war in September 1939, he lived in Romania and France, before coming to Britain for his war service, as already described.

At the end of the war, like many Polish ex-servicemen, he was drafted into the Polish Resettlement Corps. But, unlike many of his compatriots in the PRC, he spent those years on leave as an undergraduate at Fitzwilliam College in Cam-

bridge, where in 1948 he took his BA in history. I am sure that this information can somehow be incorporated into our Polish Migration Project Report which is now being completed for the trustees of the M.B. Grabowski Foundation. From Cambridge he came to this University, where he studied for his PhD at the London School of Economics under Professor Charles Manning. From London, he went to the College d'Europe at Bruges, and then in 1951 to the USA, first to Indiana, and then in 1966 to Yale. For the last two decades, he has been a full professor at Yale in certainly one of the largest, and arguably, the most eminent History Department in the United States. In that time, he has established himself as a scholar of international repute, a leading specialist in diplomatic history, and the senior practitioner of Polish history abroad.

But, since this is London University, permit me to remind Professor Wandycz of his days here. His doctoral thesis, presented in 1951, was addressed to the subject of *'Liberal Internationalism: the contribution of British and French liberal thought to the Theory of International Relations'*. It surveyed the progress of liberal thought on foreign affairs from Bentham and Mill to T.H. Green and L.T. Hobhouse; from Thiers, Lamennais and de Tocqueville to Laboulaye, Prevost-Paradol, Leroy-Baulieu, Molinari, and Revouvier, and it analysed their ideas on such things as Nationality, the Principle of Non-Intervention, on Peace, international morality, and international law. The thesis is remarkable on at least two scores: remarkable on the one hand for its lucidity — as I can personally attest; remarkable also for being, surely the only work of history by a Polish historian, which has no Polish sources in an extensive bibliography, and as far as I could see, only one short passage to the Polish Question in almost 500 pages. At the time, the young Dr Wandycz was clearly schooling himself in the priorities of British scholarship. But to avoid the 'Polish Elephant' with such single-minded determination must be seen as an act of English understatement, without parallel.

Wandycz allowed himself just one comment which betrayed his Polish heart. In a section entitled, 'The Balkanisation of Europe' he quoted a lofty letter from Clemenceau to Paderewski in 1919: 'I must also recall to your consi-

deration,' stated the French premier, 'the FACT, that it is to the endeavours and sacrifices of the [Allied] Powers ... that the Polish nation owes the recovery of its independence.' Wandycz added his gloss: 'This TONE', he wrote, 'this tone hardly showed an understanding or sympathetic attitude.'

Since then, Professor Wandycz's publications are too numerous to mention in full. They include 10 major books, and 70 academic articles. His diplomatic studies, such as *France and her Eastern Allies, 1919-25* or *Soviet-Polish Relations 1917-21* or *The United States and Poland* are definitive works. His survey of *The Lands of Partitioned Poland, 1795-1918*, recently reprinted, is by far the most reliable and comprehensive guide to perhaps the most important century in Poland's past. If I may say so, as one who has not always been so skilful, he is a diplomatic historian in both senses of the phrase: he is a scholar who has both studied Diplomacy, and has practised its skills. Professor Wandycz visits Poland regularly and it is no mean feat, whilst maintaining his strict independence of view, to be as highly regarded in Poland as among his compatriots abroad.

Professor Wandycz's greatest achievement, however, is to have spanned the cultures and traditions of the countries, to whose affairs he has devoted a lifetime of scholarship, absorbing the best qualities of each as he passed along. His work exudes the industriousness of American academe, the refinement of French learning, the fearless honesty of a Polish *intelligent*, and the cultured restraint of a gentleman from Cambridge. In short, he is a true liberal internationalist in direct succession to the thinkers whom he studied so many years ago.

In this regard, I should perhaps close in melodramatic fashion, in a tone, of which Professor Wandycz may not entirely approve, with one of Lamartine's ringing slogans from 1848, which nonetheless found its way into his youthful dissertation:

*La verité, c'est mon pays*  
(Prawda, to jest moja ojczyzna)  
(Truth is my homeland)

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, PROFESSOR PIOTR WANDYCZ.

**Norman Davies**  
(Professor of History, University of London).

## POLISH DIPLOMACY 1914-1945: AIMS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Piotr Wandycz

The word diplomacy, as Harold Nicolson reminds us in his brilliant little volume on the subject, has different meanings. It is used as a synonym for foreign policy, it signifies negotiation or the process and machinery of international intercourse, it applies to a branch of the foreign ministry or refers to skilful conduct of affairs. In this presentation the term will chiefly be used in the sense of foreign policy broadly conceived, comprising theoretical foundation, and its execution. The adjective diplomatic will appear chiefly in contrast to military or economic.

Foreign policy implies the existence of a state and a government, yet in the Polish case neither existed between 1914 and 1918. During the two and a half years which followed there was a government in Warsaw, but the shape and nature of the state was still somewhat fluid. Thus, it is only during the 20 years of the inter-war period that we can speak of a 'normal' diplomacy exerted on behalf of a 'normally' functioning member of the international community. Then, during the Second World War, a novel and unusual situation arose. Polish state territory was occupied and partitioned, but an internationally recognized government functioned on foreign soil, first in Angers, then in London. As one readily sees, Polish diplomacy had to operate during a good part of the 1914-1945 period under conditions which differed greatly from those of an average European state. When one examines its aims and achievements this has to be borne in mind.

The outbreak of the First World War found Polish lands under the rule of three different powers, two of which (Germany and Austria) were struggling against the third (Russia). This constellation created a great opportunity for the Poles seeking to regain unity and independence. The question arose, however, whether one could achieve both.

Did unity, or independence, claim priority? Which belligerent side offered greater hopes of fulfilment of Polish aims? Finally, in view of the fact that the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had been dismembered some hundred and twenty years ago, what constituted Poland in the second decade of the twentieth century?

If we discount the ephemeral Austro-Polish approach (for which Poland's future lay in a union with the Habsburg Monarchy), and the somewhat marginal revolutionary current, two major Polish trends and political centres emerged. The right grouped around Roman Dmowski who regarded the nation and its self-realization as the supreme goal. The nation, he believed, guided by self-interest, had to struggle for its survival. Seeking a Poland based on Polish ethnic masses Dmowski viewed the old multi-ethnic and gentry-ruled Commonwealth as anachronistic. Modern Poland had to be western, and not eastern, orientated: populist Piast, not noble Jagiellonian. Thus, denouncing a good part of Polish history, Dmowski followed his older associate and mentor, Jan Popławski, in the belief that even if Polish struggles for freedom had 'nothing in common with democratic principles and humanitarian ideas [and] social progress, our cause would be as good today and our right as sacred'.<sup>1</sup> This amounted to a repudiation of the traditional connection between the Polish cause and the struggle of the oppressed nations of Europe against forces of reaction embodied in Tsarist Russia.

Reversing the traditional Polish strategy on ideological grounds, Dmowski argued that Prussia, which had annexed the core of Polish lands, was the number one enemy. Prussia's rise to greatness was achieved on the ruins of Poland and it resulted in a domination of Germany. The German empire became a threat to Russia and indeed to the European balance of power. Hence, Poland's cause was inextricably linked with anti-Germanism, and Dmowski's objective was to tie it with the Franco-Russian alliance. At the beginning of the war he could speak only of unity under Russia's aegis, although he assumed that a united Poland would be large enough gradually to gain independence. He stressed Poland's greatness, arguing that to anyone familiar with European political geography there was no room for a

small and weak state between Germany and Russia. By great, he meant not only territorially but also in terms of national vision and dynamic will, thus distinguishing between the Polish nation and the little nationalities (*narodki*) of the Habsburg monarchy.

Establishing his headquarters in the west in late 1915, Dmowski strove to become Poland's spokesman in the allied camp and elevate the Polish question to an international level. His task was not easy. He had to play down the likely loss of Eastern Galicia to Russia; he feared a compromise peace which could produce another partition of Polish lands. As Russian defeats began — and Dmowski retrospectively claimed that he intuitively expected Russia to weaken by the end of the war — he spoke boldly of Poland's independence. Although he did not foresee the Russian revolutions, they enabled him to use another argument in favour of a great Poland. Only a power could be a barrier between Soviet Russia and Germany; a weak state would be merely a bridge.

Developing his programme of reconstruction of the continent in a privately printed pamphlet called *Problems of Central and Eastern Europe*, Dmowski advocated that the Germans be pushed back to their ethnic territory, and the Habsburg monarchy, which he termed 'an ulcer', destroyed. A non-Germanic Central Europe comprising national and some multinational states would help in 'safeguarding the European equilibrium and the future peace'.<sup>2</sup>

For all his ability and diligence, Dmowski could not shape the course of international events. He had not caused the first Russian proclamation to the Poles of August 1914, and he was taken by surprise by the French President's decree of June 1917 establishing a Polish army in France. But he capitalized on these developments. He also played skilfully on allied fears of a large Polish army to be formed by the Germans in the wake of the Two Emperors' Manifesto (November 1916). Dmowski proved largely successful in gaining a real monopoly of Poland's representation in the west, although Ignacy Paderewski's efforts in the United States were, by and large, independently pursued. The formation of the Polish National Committee in August 1917 endowed the Dmowski-led diplomatic activity with a more



formal status. Between September and November, the Committee was recognized by France, Britain, Italy and the United States as the official Polish representation in the west.

Dmowski, the thinker and the political strategist, often seen as Poland's unofficial foreign minister during the First World War, is usually contrasted with Piłsudski, the military leader. There is some truth in this generalization but not absolute truth. Dmowski did not underestimate the importance of military means, nor did Józef Piłsudski ever neglect politics. Endowed with qualities of charismatic leadership — stressed by foes and critics alike — he was a leader in more ways than one. It would be a mistake to take seriously Piłsudski's utterance to Cracow conservatives in the winter of 1914: 'I leave politics to you, and I keep the sword'.<sup>3</sup> Piłsudski became a soldier when he had come to the conclusion that armed struggle was the only way leading to Poland's independence, and INDEPENDENCE was Piłsudski's key word. But to the end of his life he lived and breathed politics, showing an uncanny ability to sense developments and approach them as a master tactician.

Piłsudski's insistence on the force of arms was politically and morally motivated. He fulminated against the heritage of partitions which had made the Poles passive and submissive. To regenerate morally and to throw off the corrupting effect of the recent past, the Poles could not stand by and wait for decisions to be taken by outsiders. They had to fight. But would a Polish military effort matter when million-strong armies were battling for victory? Here Piłsudski reckoned that the belligerents would be so exhausted by the end of the war that even a small Polish force could, at a critical moment, seize the initiative and create accomplished facts.

Piłsudski's strategy was in a sense bolder, and seemingly less consistent, than Dmowski's. By aligning himself for purely tactical reasons with the Central Powers, he pursued the traditional Polish struggle against Russia, but he excluded no options. Although he insisted that one could not calculate with any certainty the course of the war, he thought it likely that superior German technology would defeat Russia during the first phase of the struggle, and then

the Central Powers would succumb to the greater potential of the west. This meant that the Poles would go first against Russia and then turn against the Central Powers. Piłsudski was careful to establish some links with the west — of which more later — being, as he put it, neither 'deaf nor blind to the so-called pro-Entente arguments'.<sup>4</sup> An independent Poland, he said 'could not find herself in the future in opposition to the western powers with which she had always been linked by ties of friendship'.<sup>5</sup>

Fighting on the German-Austrian side against Russia, Piłsudski conducted from the very beginning a subtle policy of preserving and increasing his independence. This was a complex political poker played with the Central Powers in which the stakes were raised whenever possible, especially when Russia seemed no longer a real threat to Poland. Even though confined to the homeland it was clearly a diplomatic game with all the subterfuges and nuances one usually associates with it. The other less well-known feature of Piłsudski's diplomacy related to the Entente powers. From 1914 such emissaries of his camp as August Zaleski in London, Władysław Baranowski in Rome or Aleksander Dębski in the United States sought to explain the reasons for Polish cooperation with the Central Powers. Michał Sokolnicki acted as a kind of 'foreign minister' of this group. The west was being told of Polish motivation for endorsing the Provisional Council of State and later the Regency Council set up in Warsaw by the occupying Germans and Austrians.

These representations naturally ran counter to the line taken by the Polish National Committee; an inter-Polish strife developed in the west. In the United States, the Paderewski-led camp was clashing with the pro-Piłsudski KON (Komitet Obrony Narodowej). The leftist groups accused the Polish National Committee of representing the forces of reaction and anti-Semitism. This unedifying struggle was damaging to Poland's cause, yet few leaders could rise above partisanship as did Erazm Piltz (of Dmowski's Committee) when he wrote that Poles should work for their country with equal zeal on both sides of the barricade, but be careful not to harm each other. In these conditions the image of a deliberate Polish division of roles between pro-Entente and pro-Central Powers, projected by some histo-

rians, appears very much an *a posteriori* construction.

Each of the two Polish centres was scoring successes and suffering defeats. The ideological stage of the war, introduced by the revolutions in Russia and the American belligerency, proved most conducive for the cause of Polish freedom. In an atmosphere of a crusade for freedom and democracy came the two statements of President Woodrow Wilson — particularly the Fourteen Points — the proclamation of the Russian Provisional Government and the manifesto of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. These declarations, as well as the official Allied statement of June 1918 calling an independent Poland an element of peace, naturally stemmed from international considerations which transcended the Polish case. Yet they would hardly have been made were it not for the relentless pressure exerted by Polish diplomacy. By this time, a veritable Polish diplomatic service was being born. Alongside the already-mentioned representatives of the Piłsudski camp in the west, there grew a much larger diplomatic network operating under the Polish National Committee. It included such people as Władysław Sobański and Stanisław Kozicki, Erazm Piltz in Paris, or Konstanty Skirmunt in Rome. The rudimentary Polish statehood arising within the Congress Kingdom under German-Austrian occupation comprised a Cabinet and within it a Political Department — dominated by conservatives — which by October 1918 assumed the name of Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Stanisław Głąbiński was at its helm. Unable thus far to exert any real diplomatic functions, the ministry was preparing a cadre of Polish diplomatists. All these developments facilitated the task of improvisation within an independent Poland emerging in November 1918.

Some historians, especially in the west, have argued that Poland, re-emerging in 1918, owed her independence exclusively to a fortuitous combination of circumstances. The disintegration of Austro-Hungary removed one of the partitioning powers, while the collapse of Germany and the revolutions in Russia temporarily paralysed the remaining two. The efforts of the Poles appear almost superfluous, and are written off as inconsequential. This is indeed a distorted picture. Polish efforts to regain independence and unity had

been in evidence since the Partitions. From the late 18th century, the Poles had fought in six uprisings and one revolution. While the Polish question lost its international character in the last decades of the 19th century, the war of 1914–1918 naturally revived it. But the favourable circumstances would have remained an empty frame were it not for the efforts of Dmowski, Paderewski and Piłsudski, which filled it with a living content.

In mid-November 1918 Józef Piłsudski assumed power in Warsaw and notified the Entente of the re-emergence of an independent Polish state. At this point only a small part of what used to be pre-partition Poland was under the effective control of Warsaw. In Eastern Galicia the Poles were locked in combat with the Ukrainians. The former German provinces, even after the successful uprising in Wielkopolska, remained apart awaiting the verdict of the Peace Conference. In the eastern borderlands, chaos prevailed. Piłsudski's authority as the temporary chief of state and commander-in-chief in Poland was at first not recognized by the allies. The French pressed for the recognition of Dmowski's Polish National Committee as a provisional government, backed by its own armed force in France, the so-called Haller Army. This kind of dualism which could be fatal for Poland was fortunately overcome at least formally, by the mediation of Ignacy Paderewski. By early January 1919 a compromise had been reached. Piłsudski remained chief of state, Paderewski became premier, foreign minister and the chief delegate at the Peace Conference in Paris. Dmowski became the second delegate and his Committee recognized as Poland's official representation in Paris.

The compromise did not resolve the question of who was really in charge of Polish diplomacy. Piłsudski wished to have a special counselling organ in Warsaw to direct foreign policy, but no such body materialized. His delegates, sent to join the Committee in Paris, found themselves largely powerless, since Dmowski made it clear that only his point of view would be represented at the conference. Thus the compromise could not mask the existence of very real differences between Piłsudski and Dmowski on the shape and the position of the reborn Polish state. A *de facto* dualism undermined the credibility of the Polish position.

Both Piłsudski and Dmowski agreed on the goal of a large and strong Poland. Was Poland 'to be a state equal to the great world powers or a little state in need of the protection of the mighty?' Piłsudski asked. And he called for an all-out effort to turn the wheel of history so far that Poland 'would be the greatest power not only militarily, but also culturally, in the east'.<sup>6</sup>

Piłsudski and Dmowski, however, differed basically on how this was to be accomplished, Paderewski finding himself closer to Piłsudski's position. Seeking borders which would, by necessity, go beyond purely ethnic Polish territory unless the country were to be reduced to a new version of the Duchy of Warsaw, Dmowski adopted as the criterion Polish cultural and economic presence, in addition to population figures. This meant going beyond the 1772 borders in the west by the inclusion of parts of Silesia and East Prussia and giving up territories in the east annexed by Russia in the first and second partitions. The reborn Poland would be a unitary centralized state except for ethnic Lithuania which would receive cultural autonomy. This was the territorial programme presented in Paris.

The Paris Peace conference, concentrating on the treaty with Germany, had to resolve first the issue of the new German-Polish border. The French supported Dmowski's claims wishing to make Poland an anti-German bastion and a powerful ally. The British and, to a lesser extent, the Americans opposed a settlement which would be too unfavourable to Germany. Did Piłsudski, as it is sometimes asserted, show no interest in the drawing of the western borders, regarding them as a 'present' of the Entente? Did his alleged neglect of the western settlement stem from a concentration of all his efforts on the east, and result in hurting Polish chances in Upper Silesia, Gdańsk (Danzig) and East Prussia? Was the later Polish capitulation at Spa in the summer of 1920 a by-product of Piłsudski's foolhardy ventures in the east?

Recent and less partisan research has shown that Piłsudski, while recognizing the obvious fact that the final German-Polish settlement would mainly depend on the allied policy toward Germany, was very much interested in the drawing of the western borders. A stronger position in

the west would allow Poland to pursue a more vigorous policy in the east; the more powerful the state would become, the greater the chances for promoting his eastern design. No-one denied a west-east connection. The Piłsudskites, and later Paderewski, reproached Dmowski that by his policy of complete reliance on France he was, in fact, harming Polish chances *vis-à-vis* the United States and Britain, who were likely to have the decisive voice at the Conference. Dmowski's illusion that it lay in British interest to support Poland, a mistake he later acknowledged, combined with his general approach, which was bound to antagonize Wilson and especially Lloyd George. At a time when the principle of national self-determination was reigning supreme — at least in theory — Dmowski's goal of absorbing and ultimately digesting non-Polish nationalities could find little support. His great Poland would have included some 40 or more percent of Ukrainians, Belorussians, Lithuanians, Germans, Jews etc. Would not such a multi-ethnic construction be more easily endorsed by the Entente in the form of a large federation and not a unitary state? This was Paderewski's idea, and already toward the end of the war he had tried to win over Wilson and the Americans to the somewhat extravagant plan of a United States of Poland.

Piłsudski did not view Paderewski's 'federalism' as realistic or applicable in practice. He mused about the 'doors in the east' which opened and closed, blown by the gales of the civil war and the struggle of nationalities in the former Tsarist empire. While fighting the Bolsheviks, Piłsudski aimed at the creation of a large bloc under Polish leadership bound by federative ties or links of alliances — he had no exact blueprint — which would significantly increase the distance between Germany and Russia. Invoking the Jagiellonian past he appealed in Wilno to the population of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania to determine its own fate. In 1920 he concluded an alliance with the Ukraine of Semon Petliura. This 'federalist' policy implied certain sacrifices. Piłsudski was ready to abandon Wilno to a Lithuania federated with Poland, and to make some concessions in Eastern Galicia. Dmowski passionately opposed all of this. To him a federated Poland would be a weak, not a strong

state; Russia, pushed out of the Ukraine, would be an eternal enemy and the Ukrainians themselves would cooperate with Germany against the Poles.

Thus, the positions of Piłsudski and Dmowski at the time of the Paris Peace Conference were irreconcilable. This remains true, even if Piłsudski was willing to accept a Dmowski-proposed frontier in the east if everything else failed. The thesis advanced by some historians about division of roles: Dmowski winning the western borders by diplomacy, and Piłsudski the eastern frontiers by the sword, is not only too pat but misleading. If anything, Dmowski's position on federalism and national self-expression of Lithuanians and Ukrainians hurt Polish chances in general. Piłsudski's Wilno proclamation was acclaimed in Paris and skilfully exploited by Paderewski, but Dmowski's national democratic camp did everything to undermine its credibility. As Tytus Komarnicki had rightly remarked, to oppose the successful use of federalism by the Soviets by a policy of annexation and assimilation was 'setting back the clock of history'.<sup>7</sup> The Entente as well as the interested nationalities were perfectly well aware of this dualism. It proved all too easy to accuse the Poles of imperialism. Any talks with the Lithuanians and Ukrainians were rendered more difficult by the latter's fears that at any moment the Polish 'annexationist' trend might prevail over the 'federalist'.

Dmowski was not only unjustifiably suspicious of Warsaw, but he was increasingly out of tune with the mood at the Peace Conference, and taken aback by some of its decisions. Were the Polish defeats on such matters as Gdańsk (Danzig), Upper Silesia and Eastern Prussia — which a last-minute Paderewski rescue mission failed to avert — owing to the Jewish lobby in Paris? Dmowski believed so. An influential Jewish lobby, of course, existed but it was concerned mainly with the eastern territories where the vast majority of Jews lived. Lewis Namier, whom Dmowski singled out for criticism, supported Polish claims *vis-à-vis* Germany and opposed them in Eastern Galicia. Yet, Lloyd George agreed with him only with regard to the latter. It is obvious that British, not Jewish, interests were the decisive factor, and Polish defeats were largely a result of an Anglo-American victory over the French. Dmowski did not prove to be either a

masterly diplomat, nor a good tactician, which has been noted at different times even by such associates as Stanisław Grabski and Juliusz Zdanowski.

True, there was not much that he could have accomplished regarding Polish eastern frontiers which the Peace Conference was reluctant to deal with in the absence of a recognized Russian government. It was not even certain which states would border Poland in the east. Yet one thing appears clear, namely that Dmowski overestimated the willingness of the Russians to acquiesce in the division of the borderlands along the line of the second partition. The allied declaration of 8 December, 1919 on the temporary delimitation of purely Polish territories (the basis of the future Curzon Line) was influenced by the anti-Bolshevik Russians who would not concede to Poland anything beyond the old Congress Kingdom.

Does this necessarily mean that the Piłsudski alternative was correct all along, and we mean not only 'federalism' but his handling of the controversial question of peace and war against Soviet Russia? Did Poland have the possibility of concluding a lasting peace with the Bolsheviks in early 1920 which would have left her with better borders than those subsequently achieved at Riga? Being in the possession of Minsk and Wilno the Poles would have been in a better bargaining position toward Lithuania. Having concluded peace they would have avoided the concessions made at Spa and could have resolved in a more advantageous manner the question of the Teschen controversy and the East Prussian plebiscites. On the other hand, one can argue that freed from the Polish danger the Bolsheviks would have liquidated more quickly the remnants of the opposition in the Ukraine and defeated Wrangel. Had they wished to drag out the negotiations with Poland and gain maximum publicity (as they did at Brest-Litovsk) they could have done so. As their power increased so would their strength at the negotiating table. And we must not forget that we do not know what borders the Bolsheviks really had in mind — the 1920 offer concerned a demarcation line, not a frontier, also an armistice, not a peace treaty.

Piłsudski, as we know, chose the force of arms in the spring of 1920 as the only available means of achieving a

satisfactory settlement. Was that realistic? Komarnicki suggests that everything else apart, Polish diplomatic preparations were an utter failure. The Poles failed to win over the west to the awkwardly phrased Polish programme of 'disannexation' of the contested borderlands by Russia, which was seen as thinly disguised imperialism. The new Polish diplomatic service, bringing together the diverse elements from the National Committee, Warsaw's Foreign Ministry and Piłsudski's wartime adherents, and affected by the demands of the right and left for ministerial posts, could hardly be expected to cope with the complex tasks. The alliance with the Ukraine, bitterly denounced by the national democrats, did not appeal to the west. Piłsudski's, and especially his foreign minister's (Stanisław Patek's), overtures to the Entente for a general peace with the Bolsheviks were unsuccessful. The French and the British were split on the merits of the Russian case and the United States had abdicated its responsibilities. In these circumstances one can perhaps blame Piłsudski for undertaking, largely on his own, a most dangerous operation which Poland was not strong enough to carry through. Undoubtedly, the Kievan expedition was a gamble, but if Piłsudski had overestimated Polish capabilities and Soviet weaknesses, the temptation to reverse the course of the last 200 years of history was overwhelming. Indeed, only a realization of this great eastern design might have made Poland sufficiently powerful to withstand external pressures. With the Peace of Riga in 1921 Poland became a middle-size state too large to be anyone's satellite, but too small and too weak to be a great power. Many of the subsequent problems of Polish diplomacy stemmed from this half-way house position.

Was 1920 the only time in the inter-war period when Poland was able to act truly on her own and was completely independent? Such an opinion has been recently advanced, but I do not find it convincing. Piłsudski himself, who described the drawing of the borders as the 'external oddity',<sup>8</sup> referring among others to the ways he used to trick the Allies (over, for instance, the Wilno affair) admitted that he was constrained by the need for material aid from the Entente. Poland was no more a free agent in 1920 than in 1934 when she chose to sign the non-aggression declaration

with Germany. We shall have occasion to return to this point.

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The conclusion of the Riga peace treaty, followed by the Upper Silesian settlement and the adoption of the 1921 constitution, opened the inter-war period properly speaking. In the field of foreign policy three options existed for reducing or eliminating threats to Poland, (1) an alliance with either of the two great neighbours, (2) neutrality between the two, reinforced by a regional system, (3) neutrality strengthened by an alliance with France. The second and third options were not mutually exclusive; to some extent they could complement each other.

The possibility of leaning on one great neighbour against the other appeared to many outsiders the only logical course for Poland to follow. Yet this was an option that was purely theoretical. As Piłsudski had said in October 1919: 'if we were obliged to link either with the Germans or with the Bolsheviks, it would mean that our work would not be completed. Poland's civilising mission would remain unfulfilled'.<sup>9</sup> Reliance on Germany entailed accepting revision of the Versailles agreements and abandonment of Polish lands. No Pole would be prepared to take this step. In the early post-war years it would mean a breach with France; later it could perhaps be achieved under the French aegis but still at the cost of territorial sacrifices; on the eve of the war Poland could ally with Berlin on Hitler's conditions, which on the face of them were relatively modest (Gdańsk and the extraterritorial rail and road communications across the 'corridor') but which implied a total subordination to German policies. An alliance with Soviet Russia would first mean a complete isolation of Poland and a breach with the west, even if it may not have entailed any territorial losses. Later it would mean subordination to Russian policies within a larger framework with France's blessings. This, too, was not acceptable to any Poles, the small Communist group excepted. The policy of neutrality, later described as that of balance, was the only alternative. It became, in Piłsudski's words, one of the two canons of Polish diplo-

macy; theoretically after 1926, in practice in the early 1930s.

It was obvious that Poland was too weak to survive between the two neighbours without additional safeguards. As Piłsudski told a British visitor in 1920, his country was 'between the jaws of two colossal powers which by closing them could destroy her'.<sup>10</sup> The creation of a bloc keeping Russia and Germany far apart seemed the logical goal to pursue. With the failure of the 1919–1920 eastern 'federalist' designs, Polish diplomacy envisaged a bloc based on a north-south axis: from the Baltic countries down to the Balkans. If the Lithuanian issue complicated any real Baltic policy, the Danubian basin became split into two rival groups: the Little Entente (Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia) and the former enemy states, Austria and Hungary. A Polish Danubian policy could either be orientated toward Hungary — indeed unsuccessful attempts were made to try to affect a reconciliation between Budapest and Romania — or the Little Entente, especially when it became clear that France approved of the grouping. A policy of accommodation with the Little Entente was attempted by Skirmunt, as foreign minister, and Piltz, as envoy in Prague. It was continued, in the hope of persuading Czechoslovakia to join forces with Poland, by Aleksander Skrzyński in 1925–1926. All these efforts proved unsuccessful. Piłsudski and Beck regarded the Little Entente as a divisive force in the Danubian region, unwilling to become a real regional bloc opposing both Germany and Russia. Hence, attempts were made to undermine the grouping, first by operating through Romania, and second, by means of a confrontation with its leader Czechoslovakia.

Did these pro- and anti-Little Entente approaches, pursued respectively by the right-centre and pro-Piłsudski ministers, reflect basic policy differences? This is true only to some extent. If Dmowski denounced the Romanian-Hungarian attempt as nonsensical and favoured the pro-Czechoslovak line, it was under the national democratic foreign minister, Marian Seyda (and then Dmowski himself), that the relations between Warsaw and Prague visibly deteriorated. Czechoslovak-Polish antagonism largely transcended the political divisions in Poland. As Juliusz Zdanowski noted in his diary (11 November 1928), 'everything tells us to love the

Czechs and ... stand together unflinchingly. But one cannot overcome a certain feeling which makes a *rapprochement* impossible'.<sup>11</sup> The pro-Czechoslovak Seyda made it clear that unless Czechoslovakia adapted herself to the Russian policies of Poland and Romania, a Central European bloc would not materialise. It is true, however, that when in the late 1930s the Czechoslovak-Polish antagonism reached its nadir, and Beck calmly envisaged the partition of Czechoslovakia so as to remove an obstacle in his Danubian policies, the opposition in Poland bitterly criticised the anti-Prague line.

The third option, alliance with France reinforcing Poland in the first place against Germany and secondarily against the Soviet Union, was achieved in 1921. It was largely Piłsudski's work, as was to a lesser extent the alliance with Romania, signed the same year. Both were heavily endorsed by public opinion. The French alliance, in spite of all its ups and downs, remained a cornerstone of Polish diplomacy throughout the inter-war period. The Marshal termed it (together with the Romanian alliance) the second canon of his foreign policy.

Piłsudski determined the course of Polish diplomacy from 1918 until his death in 1935, except for three years from late 1922 to early 1926. Beck continued it, or believed he did, until 1939. Hence we should concentrate our attention on the Marshal and his ideas; some of them have already been mentioned. While conscious of Poland's weakness, Piłsudski was fiercely independent and highly suspicious of what he called 'foreign agencies'. He believed in secrecy and many people shared the view of the peasant leader, Wincenty Witos, that 'hardly anyone in Poland knows the foreign policy roads on which Mr Piłsudski travels'.<sup>12</sup> His decisions and moves may occasionally appear impulsive and unpremeditated, but as the French ambassador, Jules Laroche, stressed, they were the result of long meditations. His lucidity and 'finesse' struck the French foreign minister, Louis Barthou, in 1934, that is, only one year before the Marshal's death. Piłsudski combined a certain type of romanticism with a hard-boiled pragmatic approach. He disliked multilateralism in international affairs as ineffective, and viewed the League of Nations as grounded in prevailing

fashion, not in reality. Bilateral agreements always struck him as most sensible and likely to be effective.

Unlike Eduard Beneš, who elevated foreign policy to a philosophy and a system, Piłsudski hardly ever theorised about matters international. Indeed, among Polish foreign ministers only Aleksander Skrzyński had attempted, in his speeches and writings, to relate diplomacy to a broader ideological-philosophical framework. That is not to say that when Piłsudski came to power in 1926, he had no clear ideas on foreign policy. That he did, and his followers tried to construct a Piłsudskite doctrine of Polish diplomacy. A perceptive historian of inter-war diplomacy, M. Zacharias, has suggested its five characteristics: 'stability, consistency, continuity, independence, activity'.<sup>13</sup> Piłsudski's chief aim after 1926 had been to emancipate diplomacy (and military affairs) from the constraints of domestic politics. By 1930–32, if not earlier, this had been achieved, and a distinctive Piłsudski-type line emerged under Beck. A good description of it appeared in a Romanian diplomatic report in 1937: 'Polish foreign policy appears at first glance as a tortuous line. Its adversaries see in it appearances, the absence of a guiding idea and of political consistency. [This is] a grave error which proves a complete misunderstanding of Polish political mentality and of the special situation in which Poland finds herself.' And he adds that the famous balancing act, so much criticised, reflected nothing else but the concern to 'preserve an independent state'.<sup>14</sup>

The principle of balance was, as we recall, one of the two canons of Piłsudski's diplomacy; the alliance with France and Romania being the other. Zaleski related how, shortly after the May 1926 *coup*, Piłsudski spelled them out to foreign ministry officials. At that time, it was painfully clear that France had been seeking to diminish her alliance obligations. The victory of the French left in 1924, combined with such international developments as the Dawes Plan and Locarno, marked the end of the heyday of Franco-Polish cooperation. Locarno, which was anathema to Piłsudski, restricted the freedom of the French to assist Poland militarily. Briand's policy of a reconciliation with Berlin could be dangerous from the Polish viewpoint. Piłsudski differentiated between what he termed the French system in East

Central Europe based on Prague and the bilateral Franco-Polish alliance. He was interested only in the latter and above all in its military side. Well aware of the fact that French active assistance was increasingly dependent on the position of London, he cast his eyes in that direction. It would be a gross over-simplification, however, to say that the interest in a pro-British line distinguished the post-May regime from the pre-1926 governments. Already Skrzyński had wished for a *rapprochement* with Britain, and one could go even farther back than that. But the concept that the road to Paris led through London could not be successfully applied given British lack of interest in Poland until 1939.

Between 1926 and 1930 Polish diplomacy fought to fill the security gap created by Locarno, which was likely to grow should the allies prematurely evacuate the Rhineland without asking for any German guarantees to Poland. It was obvious that Paris wished to subordinate the Franco-Polish alliance to a general détente in Europe even though the 1927–1928 attempt to water down the military convention met with Piłsudski's refusal. The evacuation of the Rhineland and the settlement at The Hague Conference in 1930–31 appeared to the opposition in Poland as a major defeat of the 'sanacja' diplomacy. National Democrats blamed Zaleski for a policy of accommodation to Briand rather than coming into the open with sharp protests and support for the French rightist opponents. Yet Zaleski's low profile and the emphasis on the theme of peace could hardly have been replaced by another approach.

In the post-Locarno atmosphere it was essential to diminish the fears that Piłsudski might revive his military plans against Russia. That Poland was fundamentally pacific should not have been a secret to anyone. The country was too weak to embark on any adventures. This was stressed by such different people as General Sikorski at a cabinet meeting in 1922, Skrzyński in his numerous utterances, and Piłsudski, both before and after May 1926. Publicly and in private the Marshal repeated that he would have to be mad to risk his victor's laurels in a war against Russia. At the 1931 deliberations connected with the disarmament conference, the Polish General staff's assumption was that Poland would strive to strengthen peace and in the worst case seek to

'delay the outbreak of war'.<sup>15</sup> Yet, suspicions of Piłsudski's old 'federalist' programme and of the Promethean movement (seeking an emancipation of the non-Russian peoples of the USSR) persisted in the west and among the national democratic opponents. In reality, if the Piłsudskites thought about a reduction of Russia to its ethnic border at all, they saw it as coming only after a Russian revolution. Prometheism did not enter into normal foreign policy calculations. As Skrzyński had said in 1925, 'not a single Pole dreams about advancing even one kilometre into the endless Russian space'.<sup>16</sup>

Right after 1926 Piłsudski was interested merely in détente with Russia; by 1929, however, he was willing to become party to the Litvinov Protocol which applied the principles of the Kellogg-Briand Pact to relations between the Soviets and their western neighbours. By 1932, first prompted by France and then restrained by her, Warsaw proceeded to the conclusion of a treaty of non-aggression with the USSR. The Poles stressed that the treaty was completed independently of Paris and entirely on their own. Concentrating on the improvement of direct relations with both neighbours, Polish diplomacy found that there had been no visible progress on the German side since Piłsudski's rise to power. The tariff war dragged on even though Berlin came to realise that economic pressure would not suffice to force Poland into political concessions. The assumption that Piłsudski, being more friendly to Germany than to Russia, would be more amenable to make territorial sacrifices, proved utterly erroneous. The desire to break up the German-Russian cooperation, whose edge was clearly anti-Polish, did not prove possible in the 1920s.

The non-aggression treaty with the USSR was the first glimmer of hope that the German-Soviet pincers might be prised open. Developments in the west, first Franco-British concessions to Germany in the matter of disarmament, followed in 1933 by Hitler's rise and Mussolini's proposal of a directorate of the great powers — the so-called Four Power Pact — created a new situation. In late 1932 Zaleski was replaced by Józef Beck as foreign minister, which heralded a transition to a more dynamic, and tougher, Polish foreign policy. One indication of it was the defiant opposition to the

Four Power Pact. Another, the controversial 'preventive war' overtures to France. The term itself is a misnomer, and Piłsudski's objective seemed to have been to test the determination of both France and Germany. One can doubt the existence of an explicit offer, but there were certainly various trial balloons of which the French were well aware — and scared. In Berlin the tough Polish line inspired respect.

Did Piłsudski at this stage revise his main foreign policy assumptions? Judging by his instructions to Beck, he did not. He again stressed the importance of the direct relationship with the neighbours and loyalty to alliances. He opposed a subservient posture and acceptance of decisions taken without Polish participation. Beck later translated this typical Piłsudski concern about independence into the 'nothing about us without us' slogan.

In January 1934 Piłsudski executed his most spectacular and controversial *coup*: the non-aggression declaration with Germany. The pact (as it is often, if not quite correctly, described) was arrived at without French involvement but explicitly preserved the Franco-Polish alliance. The declaration was partly possible because Hitler broke with Moscow, but it confirmed the fact that the German-Soviet pincers had been torn open. The declaration, and this was perhaps its most important — if somewhat paradoxical — purpose, was to make Poland less dependent on France, to enhance Warsaw's value in French eyes, and to prevent the possibility of a Franco-German deal at Poland's expense. In Mackiewicz's words: 'Only since January 26, 1934 does France begin to count with us as an ally'.<sup>17</sup> This was largely an illusion.

Most likely Piłsudski regarded the declaration as a temporary arrangement, a chance too good to be missed. He told his collaborators that he could guarantee peace for just four years; the pact was valid for ten. This was a pretty accurate forecast. The declaration, taken jointly with the non-aggression treaty with Russia, formally introduced the balance policy (Beck journeyed to Moscow shortly after the signature) but the balancing act would not be easy to maintain. Piłsudski himself spoke of two stools and wondered which one he would fall off first — the declaration was



to gain time, or as a contemporary joke had it, to remove Poland from the *hors d'oeuvres* on the German revisionist menu to the category of dessert. That German expansion would be deflected from east to a south-eastern direction (Austria and Czechoslovakia) did not worry Warsaw. Piłsudski regarded the two states as doomed anyway.

The policy of balance was explained to the French in the following terms: history and geography have taught that 'our decisive problem is the neighbourly relationship with Germany and Russia', and 'that the biggest catastrophe which befell our nation stemmed from the activity of these two states ... [and] one could find no power in the world that would come to our help'. Hence, 'Warsaw's policy can never be dependent either on Moscow or on Berlin', and should an attempt be made in that direction 'we shall be forced to say *non possumus*'.<sup>18</sup>

Even if the policy of balance was to be fully accepted by the two great neighbours, and Beck's visit to Moscow showed that the Russians were not convinced that Poland would maintain a strict neutrality, one had to reconcile the principle of balance with that of alliances. On paper everything was correct, but just as Locarno had cast a shadow on the Paris-Warsaw relationship, so did the non-aggression declaration. Would it be possible to revert to the intimate alliance of the early 1920s? The Poles insisted on several occasions that should it come to a Franco-German war they would unhesitatingly fulfil their allied obligations. In fact, if the declaration would make the Germans attack France first this would, in the Polish opinion, ensure a two-front war. Should the Germans attack Poland first this was not so certain. No wonder then that on military grounds the Poles felt that the declaration was an asset. The main French concern, however, was diplomatic, not military, and the declaration complicated the tasks of French foreign policy. This was evident when Barthou visited Poland in the spring of 1934 and when the French sought to pressure Warsaw to adhere to the Eastern Pact based on Franco-Soviet cooperation. Warsaw refused to become part of any multilateral system which would compromise her policy of balance. Paris and Moscow saw it as evidence that the Poles were leaning toward Berlin.

In the late 1930s the policy of balance took a new twist as Polish diplomacy began to interpret it also as neutrality between the ideological blocs: the vacillating west and the ever more powerful Germany. Beck's contempt for the appeasers and a certain fascination with the dictators made him appear as leaning toward Berlin. Even his tough methods seemed to be modelled upon their style. Thus, he answered the Anschluss with an ultimatum to Lithuania, and the Munich conference, from which he had been excluded, with an ultimatum to Prague. Beck's instructions of September 1937, to a Polish delegation in Geneva, are revealing for his way of thinking. He wrote: 'Since the troubled world fears dynamic states, and to avoid a clash gladly reaches a settlement with them, let us stress these elements which testify to and convey the impression that we are a dynamic [people]'.<sup>19</sup> Under-Secretary, Jan Szembek, rather boastfully referred to his country's determination in matters international.

Beck obviously was not blind to the German danger. He hoped, however, to impress Berlin by strength and he made efforts to build a 'third Europe' in cooperation with Budapest and Rome. This was hardly a realistic scheme, yet what were the alternatives?

Seen retrospectively, the cardinal objective of Polish diplomacy was to avoid isolation in war. This Beck seemingly achieved through the 1939 alliance with Britain. It was paradoxical in a sense that Britain concluded such an agreement with Poland, which had been previously criticised as an accomplice of Germany in the Czechoslovak crisis. It may well be that the fear of German-Polish collusion made London desirous to bring Warsaw over to its side. In 1939, Beck thought that Germany might move against France, which was plausible, but he did not anticipate Hitler's desire to neutralise Poland, first through an attempt to rivet her to the Third Reich by means of concessions (Gdańsk and the extraterritorial highway-railroad). Beck, who thought that the correct, almost friendly relationship between Berlin and Warsaw would suffice, was taken aback. Both he and Hitler knew that the issue was not Gdańsk but a change of Poland's status *vis-à-vis* Germany. The reply could only be *non possumus* and a tight alliance with the west, although Warsaw was prepared to fight, if need be, alone.

Could Beck have acted differently? Some of the criticisms heaped on him cancel each other out. A.J.P. Taylor seems to accuse him of first tricking Britain into the alliance and then sabotaging British last-minute peace efforts. Others blame him for doing the opposite: pursuing a policy of conciliation and seeking to do everything to avoid provoking Germany. The fact that Beck and the general staff overestimated Polish military strength and underestimated that of Germany did not really change anything. Even if their calculations had been more accurate, a capitulation was out of the question.

True, but as a critic has suggested, Beck should have immediately turned to Soviet Russia to get an ally in the east. Such a move was, of course, impossible, given the prevailing atmosphere, even if Beck and Ambassador Grzybowski had anticipated a German-Soviet pact, which they had not. Could overtures from Warsaw have prevented a German-Soviet Entente? The answer hinges largely on what were the real objectives of the Soviet Union. Was the USSR pushed into cooperation with Hitler by an indifferent or hostile west and Poland, or did it eagerly seize the German option which was always regarded as preferable to the western connection? Although the former supposition may have more adherents, the latter cannot be lightly dismissed. Moreover, (another paradox noted by Adam Ulam in his history of Soviet foreign policy), the British guarantee to Poland reassured the USSR that the west would find itself in war with Germany, and it placed Moscow in the enviable position of being courted by both Germany and the west. It is plausible that Soviet manoeuvres in 1939 were calculated to ensure a conflict between the capitalist powers, from which Russia could eventually reap the benefits, as indeed she did in 1945. Stalin may have hoped to accomplish this without having to endure a German invasion in 1941. Should we accept this thesis, there was nothing that Polish diplomacy could do to avert the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. Indeed, the Soviet demand for an *a priori* permission to enter Polish territory was probably made precisely because Moscow knew that everyone in Poland, including the national democratic and socialist critics of Beck, would reject it.

Before attempting a general evaluation of Polish diplomacy, a few words need still to be said about *forces profondes*. In a brief

presentation their importance can only be mentioned but not analysed. Let us look first at the connection between domestic and external policies. Although it would be difficult to attribute any concrete Polish diplomatic move to exclusively domestic considerations or to see a definite impact of the *sejm* on foreign policy matters, the two spheres were obviously not unrelated. If we look at the diplomacy of the early 1920s, the Zaleski era and the Beck years, we can see a certain symmetry between them and respectively the ascendancy of the *sejm*, the period of the premiership of Bartel (bartlowanie), and the post-Brześć tightening of the authoritarian regime. Ignacy Matuszewski, writing in *Polityka Narodów* in 1935, stressed that Piłsudski's diplomacy was never a function of the domestic struggle for power. He opined, however, that by 1931-1935 an equilibrium was reached between external and internal policies, by which he meant Piłsudski's mastery in both spheres.

It is not easy to characterise the input of public opinion and that of political trends. A historian and diplomat, Michał Sokolnicki, had harsh things to say about Polish public opinion, swayed by 'prejudice, gossip, and even foreign suggestions'. He spoke of 'constant contradictions and vacillations ranging from a naïve faith to suspicion, from uncritical enthusiasm to unjustified disappointment'.<sup>20</sup> Aleksander Bregman cited a Polish diplomat who said that when he returned home and read only the local press he quickly lost touch with international realities.<sup>21</sup> Laroche accused the Poles of having real difficulty in understanding the western mentality. Piłsudski castigated the 'Polish brain [which] does not know how to see soberly and concretely'.<sup>22</sup> The French military attaché spoke disparagingly of the intoxicating 'great power elixir' served to the public periodically by the governmental press. While the Poles have a tendency either to flagellate themselves or to seek comfort in self-reassuring myths, they find it very difficult to understand why they may not be attractive as partners. In the inter-war years, as Karski suggests, Poland's domestic instability, national minority problems, military weakness, and distrust of the foreign ministers abroad, all operated against her.

The complex phenomenon of the Polish mental climate undoubtedly affected the conduct of foreign policy. The Piłsudski-type *Weltanschauung* with a stress on military virtues and imponderabilia militated in favour of determina-

tion in international affairs and parading of military prowess. It was no accident that Beck singled out the word 'honour' in his reply to Hitler in May 1939. Such terms as appeasement, compromise, or capitulation had a special and foreign ring in Polish ears. Big ideas which the Czechs called 'romantic' and 'eastern' were more appealing to the Poles. The impact of integral nationalism in the edition of the Dmowski camp was profound. It was anti-German and pro-French and pro-Italian. At the same time it operated widely with the concepts of a Judeo-Masonic-Bolshevik conspiracy and promoted sympathy for the extreme rightist and anti-democratic forces, for instance in Spain. Yet, neither the national democratic criticism of Polish policy for its neglect of France and the Soviet Union and for an inclination toward Berlin, nor the demands of the socialists that Poland join the cause of democracy against fascism, altered Beck's course. This might well suggest that the alternatives proposed by the opposition were not real, or that they differed in appearance rather than in substance from the actual policies.

Another aspect which needs to be mentioned is the conduct of diplomacy. The ultimate authority over foreign policy was in Piłsudski's hands, as stated officially, albeit unconstitutionally in 1928. The Cabinet never debated foreign policy until the Marshal's death. The Committee of State Defence (Komitet Obrony Państwa) seems to have met only once in 1926; after Piłsudski's death it was replaced by the Committee of the Republic (Komitet Obrony Rzeczypospolitej) presided over by the President and including key ministers. Its secretariat had both preparatory and implementing functions; its importance was mainly for the area of economic mobilisation.

Far too little has been written about the executors of Polish foreign policy, that is, ministers, representatives abroad, and the office at home. The importance of the ministers was naturally greater in the early period, and more than a dozen of them were at Wierzbowa prior to May 1926. Only Eustachy Sapieha, Skirmunt and Skrzyński, however, served for more than a year, and were able thus to assure some continuity. After May 1926, Zaleski headed the ministry for six and a half years, Beck a little longer. A systematic examination of the personalities, ideas, background, and standing in the country

and abroad of the ministers and of the entire diplomatic personnel, would be most desirable. It would provide us with a better idea how effective an instrument the ministry was and how justified were the numerous criticisms made of it. Lacking tradition it had only 20 years to coalesce and function.

Can one speak of a definite impact of the army on Polish diplomacy? The fact that Piłsudski was a marshal and his closest collaborators were generals or colonels may convey a distorted picture of the situation. Such keen observers of the Polish scene as Ambassador Laroche and the British Consul Savery opined that it would be a mistake to draw comparisons to military juntas or to regard these 'colonels' as typical representatives of the army establishment.<sup>23</sup> Yet, a certain element of military mentality and fashion did prevail, Beck himself stressing his colonel's rank. Piłsudski insisted that he was the only man in uniform in Poland who was engaged in politics, and in that sense the army's interference as a distinct entity was not real before 1935. After Piłsudski's death the possibility of an army-foreign ministry dualism emerged when Marshal Edward Rydz-Śmigły took over the position of commander-in-chief. The organ of the army *Polska Zbrojna* began to voice its views on foreign matters. Even then, however, although there is some debate on this score, Beck succeeded in retaining an upper hand in the matters of his department.

The army was, of course, an all-important factor in diplomacy, but in a different sense — guns, as the saying goes, are the *ultima ratio* of kings. For years Poland counted with the N+R (Germany plus Russia) strategic threat. The question whether Germany or Russia were more dangerous to Poland in the mid-1930s was posed by Piłsudski to Beck and Szembek on the one side and the military chiefs on the other. The issue of the military convention with France preoccupied both groups. So did the relative weakness of the Polish army, especially in equipment and economic support, even though military expenses absorbed roughly one third of the state budget. Given the relative economic backwardness of Poland, army expenditure was a tremendous strain, but could produce only mediocre results. Foreign help was essential, and on several occasions Poland had to plead for financial aid from France. She never received enough of it.

The economic factor can only be touched upon here. The dis-

crepancy between Polish population and territory, which placed her among the large European states, and her economic position, was striking. The former entitled her to an almost great power status, the latter pulled her down and limited her international possibilities. Poland's intimate involvement in the world economy did not, in the opinion of two well-known historians, Zbigniew Landau and Jerzy Tomaszewski, confer advantages. On the contrary, they see Poland, very pessimistically, as 'a terrain of exploitation for foreign enterprises and states rather than a country actively sharing on a footing of equality in the international division of obligations and privileges'.<sup>24</sup> The implications of this state of affairs for diplomacy are obvious. To stress the crucial role of economic factors, however, is not tantamount to economic determinism. Dependence on French capital did not prevent Warsaw from pursuing a policy of independence from Paris in the 1930s. The tariff war with Germany did not lead to Polish dependence on Berlin; in fact, a German-Polish *rapprochement* in the mid-1930s was not influenced by economic considerations. During periods of sharp tension between Warsaw and Prague, Polish-Czechoslovak commercial relations, profitable to Poland, remained largely unaffected. The weak economic base restricted Polish possibilities but did not dictate the direction of her diplomacy. The inclusion of yet another factor, the sizeable national minorities, would transcend the scope of this presentation. Suffice it to say that it was another source of weakness, internationally speaking. From the imposition on Poland of the minority treaty to its denunciation in 1934, the issue had serious repercussions on Polish foreign policy. In 1939, the two invading neighbours invoked it to justify their action.

The catastrophic September campaign of 1939, and the subsequent occupation of the country by Germany and Soviet Russia, came as a shock to all Poles. Inter-war diplomacy, especially of the late 1930s, was singled out as a cause of the collapse of the Second Republic. After the war, Communist writers and pseudo-historians of the Stefan Arski type surpassed each other in their denunciations of Beck. They represented him as an agent of Hitler who sought to provoke war against the Soviet Union — an absurd accusation. After 1956 the criticism of Beck went along different and more plausible lines. Polish diplomacy was pictured as having been affected by the anti-

French and anti-Soviet prejudices of Pilsudski; as having suffered from great power illusions; and as being badly executed by Beck, who trusted German assurances. This point of view was challenged by those who argued that the Polish position was determined by the great powers' policy of concessions toward Germany. Poland had no choice and Beck, therefore, could hardly be blamed for what eventually happened. According to yet another interpretation, the post-Versailles system was doomed, yet Poland was not a mere object — Warsaw could hasten or delay the catastrophe. Beck, however, basing his policy on incorrect assumptions, finally allowed himself to be surprised by events. The critics suggested as the only real alternative a consistently pro-Soviet policy, but several of them admitted that given the politico-socio-economic structure of Poland this was not a viable option. In most recent surveys of inter-war Polish diplomacy there is a marked tendency toward a more balanced treatment. While some of Beck's moves are criticized, his general line is viewed with understanding.

The point periodically restated — that Poland was a mere object of the great powers' policies — is partly obvious and partly misleading. It is obvious in the sense that the smaller the resources of a state the more limited its possibilities and the greater its dependence on the mighty, but this was not a uniquely Polish phenomenon. Furthermore, had the Second Republic been simply a plaything of the powers, the conduct of its diplomacy and indeed its study would be largely irrelevant and pointless. The real question is how well did Polish diplomacy perform under very difficult conditions? It is easy to win the game holding all the aces; a player with a poor hand is unable to win, but he can be more or less skilful. He can bluff, prolong the game, and minimize his losses.

A somewhat nuanced verdict on the aims and achievements of inter-war Polish diplomacy would be in order. The twin canons of balance and of alliances could hardly have been replaced in the existing circumstances without compromising Poland's security and independence. True, they were not easy to reconcile with each other and they created complications in the region, but regional cooperation under Polish leadership was not a real possibility either in the 1920s or late 1930s. It is a futile exercise to try to guess what Pilsudski would have done in the changing conditions of the late 1930s, but there is little doubt

that Beck tried to adhere to the line the Marshal had established. In doing so, he may have accentuated its weakest and most dubious points. For a *status quo* state like Poland it was hardly fitting to undermine further the prestige of the League of Nations or to indulge in 'little revision'. On occasions Beck gave the impression of having imbibed the 'great power elixir' although he officially and privately kept denying it. It was unfortunate that Poland's foreign minister had the distinction of being among the most unpopular actors on the international scene, even though popularity *per se* was no guarantee against disaster. Beck's protagonist Beneš experienced this in the dark days of Munich. Still, Beck's diplomacy did provide Poland's enemies with some ammunition during the Second World War, making her position more vulnerable.

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With September 1939 we enter the stage of war diplomacy with all its characteristic features. The central goal is victory or at least avoidance of defeat and all diplomatic efforts are geared to it. The influence of military operations becomes supreme, diplomacy being affected by or even subordinated to war strategy. If *inter arma* muses are silent, the diplomatists are not, but they tend to become single-minded.

The staggering Polish military defeat — the *Blitzkrieg* was as yet a novelty — had an adverse impact on Poland's international standing. Those people in the west who had always ridiculed Polish claims to a great power status were gloating. The heroic resistance of Poles, and their priceless contribution in the form of the Enigma, could not change the brutal fact that a recreated Polish army abroad would be very small and dependent on the allies for its equipment. Militarily the Poles were no longer partners to be treated with deference; their attempts to participate in the Supreme War Council were partly successful. The occupation of the homeland deprived the Polish government of its natural base and its resources. True, the gold of the Polish Bank had been evacuated abroad, but the government, operating first on French and then on British soil, had to live on credit. Its dependence on the host country was unavoidable. The French interfered in the constitution of the new cabinet (under the presidency of Władysław Raczkiewicz) with General Władysław Sikorski as premier and commander-in-chief. Later,

the British would exert pressures to bring about changes. The Sikorski Cabinet was mainly composed of representatives of pre-war opposition parties. It could not make a clean break with the past as some politicians desired because its very legality was derived from the principle of continuity under the 1935 constitution. The Cabinet was less homogenous than might otherwise have been the case. Moreover, Sikorski relied on individuals such as Józef Retinger who were outside the ministry, but who had valuable British contacts. The government was not really responsible to a substitute parliament (the National Council), which in turn could not be normally elected. No wonder that the government felt that it was not qualified to make decisions regarding Poland's territorial integrity.

As the government became isolated by Soviet enmity toward the end of the war, the pretence of treating it as an equal ally was dropped altogether. At Yalta on February 7, 1945, President Roosevelt brutally affirmed: 'There hasn't really been any Polish government since 1939. It is entirely in the province of the three of us [US, Britain, and Russia] to help set up a government ... I dislike the idea of continuity.'<sup>25</sup>

Up to the summer of 1940 Poland was a member of a triple alliance together with France and Britain. Thereafter, for more than a year, Britain was her sole great power ally. By the end of 1941, however, the Poles would sink to the role of a poor relative of the Grand Alliance in which the membership fee, as Churchill once put it, was at least one million soldiers. While the American entry into the war seemed a happy event from the Polish viewpoint, the presence of Russia created a most unusual diplomatic situation. A power which, in collusion with Nazi Germany, had occupied roughly half of Poland, then annexed this area and deported over a million of its inhabitants into the interior of the USSR, was now a member of the same anti-German coalition. The Poles who thought of being in a *de facto* state of war with the Soviet Union, had to resolve this problem of relationship, bearing in mind the common struggle against Germany and the unity of the alliance.

Among the powers only Britain had clear commitments to Poland. These limited London's freedom of manoeuvre, but were in turn affected by British attitudes toward Poland and her place in Europe. The British had viewed Poland as a

small state arbitrarily expanded after the First World War and consequently a source of trouble with Germany and Russia. Soviet action in September 1939 was doubtless reprehensible, but Polish territorial losses seemed irreversible and largely inevitable. The British had not explicitly guaranteed Poland's territorial integrity. Moreover, they regretted that a chance had been missed in 1939 to bring Soviet Russia into the war against Hitler. Hence, there was an ambivalence in British feelings about Poland. Perhaps the best solution would be if the Poles made concessions to the Soviets and were compensated at Germany's expense. But the idea of compensation was vague, and it did not imply augmenting or even preserving the size of pre-war Poland. A small Polish state seemed preferable; it might improve its position by combining with Czechoslovakia or Hungary. Thus a sympathy for the Polish ally did not mean identity of views with the government. In fact, the British viewed the Poles as over-ambitious and lacking in political sense.

The United States looked upon Poland as a far away and rather unimportant country, a minor sector in American global policies. In 1939-1940 Poland's value to Washington was mainly propagandistic — to educate the isolationist Americans in the realities of the Nazi 'new order'. The presence of several millions of Polish-Americans affected, but never in a decisive way, the thinking of the makers of the United States policy. The Wilsonian theme of national self-determination, and the slogan of making the world safe for democracy, operated to the advantage of the Poles, seen as victims of totalitarian aggression. But American idealism was so much intertwined with hard-boiled realism that it was not easy for a Pole to distinguish between policy statements and lip-service paid to lofty ideas, particularly when the speaker was F.D. Roosevelt, who used his personal charm to sweeten bitter pills.

While examining Polish diplomacy one cannot ignore either Roosevelt or Churchill, for their personal impact on Poland's fate and on the Russo-Polish syndrome, was crucial. Supremely self-confident, nay vain, each of the two leaders believed that he could best handle Stalin. A conciliatory policy toward Soviet Russia was essential, first

because she could be defeated, and one had to prolong her resistance, then because she was bearing the brunt of the fighting and there was fear of a separate Russo-German peace, finally, because the Soviet Union was rising as one of the super powers, and it was felt that one could do little about it. As part of the process, public opinion in America and Britain had to be 'sold' on Russia, and convinced that the gallant Russian ally was fighting for the same goals as the western democracies. As the USSR was pictured as the embodiment of all the virtues, the image of Poland had to suffer. Hypocrisy on an unprecedented scale became unavoidable, though regrettable, element of wartime allied propaganda.

The story of Polish wartime diplomacy falls into two periods, each of them subdivided into two distinct phases. The first, dominated by the person of General Sikorski, lasted from 1939 to 1943, the Soviet-Polish treaty of July 1941 constituting an internal watershed. The foreign ministry during those years was, up to mid-1941, in the hands of August Zaleski, and thereafter in the care of Edward Raczynski. The second period was mainly that of Mikołajczyk's premiership to December 1944, its last phase corresponding to the brief tenure of the Tomasz Arciszewski cabinet. Tadeusz Romer was foreign minister in the Mikołajczyk government, Adam Tarnowski in that of Arciszewski. Although Polish foreign policy was in the final analysis shaped by Sikorski and to a lesser extent by Mikołajczyk, it was conducted by pre-war professional diplomats. The only notable exception was Professor Stanisław Kot as ambassador in Moscow. With the exclusion of some of the closest associates of Beck and the promotion of a few opponents, the Polish foreign service loyally supported Sikorski in his course. Could one expect, however, a total change of outlook and direction of Polish post-1939 diplomacy?

The entire generation of the Second Republic, irrespective of whether they had been adherents or adversaries of the pre-war regime, shared certain common characteristics derived from the struggle for independence and the defence of the endangered inter-war Poland. Sikorski himself, although he had spent a good deal of time in the west, and had been influenced by it, was also a product of the ardent

early 20th-century Polish patriotism. Does it mean that he was essentially a continuator and an exponent of the pre-war outlook on matters international which he adapted to the new circumstances? Or was he an innovator trying to turn a new page of history? The American scholar, Sarah M. Terry, argues that the latter was the case. According to her, Sikorski, while obviously drawing on past ideas, wished to re-orient fundamentally the internal structure and the external relationships of his country. Rejecting the concept of balance (or of that of the two enemies), together with Beck's scheme of a Third Europe, he pursued a triple programme of a Central European federation or confederation, of a westward extension at Germany's expense, and that of reconciliation with Russia. This programme she sees as a definite departure from the eastern Jagiellonian heritage, and she credits Sikorski with the promotion of the Odra-Nysa (Oder-Neisse) border. As for the means the General employed, she stressed Sikorski's 'plasticity,' which resulted from lack of leverage over the great powers.

This interpretation is by no means universally accepted. Most historians recognize Sikorski's talents, view him as an autocratically-inclined (although a believer in democracy) and an immensely vain person — he even said on one occasion that he could handle Stalin if nobody interfered — but question his great vision and design. The 'plasticity' that Terry lauds, they ascribe to a long-lasting tendency of leaning on a great power, first Austria, then France, then Britain. Did Sikorski trust the British unreservedly and take literally Churchill's alleged exclamation in 1940: 'We shall conquer together or we shall die together?'<sup>26</sup> His constant efforts to gain a second great ally, the United States, may belie it. An assessment of Sikorski's personality is rendered more difficult by his sudden transitions from optimism to pessimism or vice versa. Since he spoke no English, how much were his statements affected by the translator's views? Did Sikorski try to imitate Piłsudski for whom, all the differences notwithstanding, he had great respect? Did he believe that the 1918 collapse of both mighty neighbours might repeat itself? There are no easy answers.

The contrasts between Sikorski and Piłsudski have been convincingly outlined by Raczynski in his World War II

memoirs, where he stressed Sikorski's understanding of, and his ability to deal with, foreigners. All that despite the fact that he was a poor linguist. Indeed, unlike the Marshal, Sikorski was more popular abroad than among his countrymen although, unlike Piłsudski he did not castigate the Poles but sought their support.

Aiming at the reconstitution of an independent Poland, Polish diplomacy concentrated first on the fulfilment of Allied obligations to the government in exile, on influencing international public opinion toward supporting more adequate Polish borders with Germany, and on seeking improved relations with the Czechs, Slovaks and Lithuanians. After the fall of France, Zaleski formulated in mid-August as main foreign policy goals: the stress on the alliance with Britain and support for the Free French, the readiness to fight even against Italy should it be essential for military reasons, the sympathy for the occupied nations, the insistence on the restoration of the eastern borders and the expectation of good relations with the independent Baltic states. The Zaleski circular disclaimed the idea of joining in any policies of dismemberment of Russia. As for Sikorski he had told the Cabinet in November 1939 that the Poles must not do anything that would push the Soviets into German arms, while making the allies understand clearly the danger which threatened them from the east.

Did these formulations constitute a break with the past? Sikorski lost no opportunity to criticize the pre-war policies toward Czechoslovakia and Russia and to blame Beck for courting Berlin and antagonizing France. In his December 1939 message to the homeland, he underlined the need for an organization between the Baltic, the Black Sea, and the Aegean opposing the German eastward expansion and separating Germany from Russia. Zaleski, in his February 1940 circular, described such a regional grouping as 'a bulwark between Germany and the east.'<sup>27</sup> This sounded like a revival of the pre-war federalist policies; yet one could detect differences between Sikorski and Zaleski. Seeking to make Poland a more creditable ally and believing that his country's standing improved with each new division, the general explored the possibility of raising an army among the deportees in Russia. He profited from Sir Stafford

Cripps' mission to Moscow in 1940 to make timid overtures. He intimated privately to the British that he realized that a total restitution of Polish lands in the east may not be possible. Probably the fall of France, which came as a shock to Sikorski, contributed to another bit of dubious diplomacy on the general's part. A Soviet intrigue might also have been present. In June 1940 a draft memorandum, envisaging territorial concessions to Russia, came into existence and although Sikorski avowed it, a second, revised document was still deemed inappropriate and withdrawn under the pressure of Raczkiewicz and Zaleski. The episode contributed to a domestic governmental crisis, and it also sent somewhat confused signals to the British and the Russians. Was Sikorski more flexible *vis-à-vis* Russia than other Poles?

Officially, the Polish government took the position that it was premature to define its war aims. Indeed, the insistence on *status quo* in the east, and demands for strategic rectification of the western borders could command little support among the British. Hence, Sikorski concentrated his efforts on promoting a Czechoslovak-Polish *rapprochement* as a first step toward a future regional union, and on trying to enlist the support of the United States which, as he put it, would have a decisive influence on the final outcome of the war. In April 1941 Sikorski went to America not only as a Pole but as a spokesman — to some extent self-appointed — of the smaller European states. He obtained Roosevelt's general blessing for his joint efforts with Beneš — as exemplified by a November 1940 Declaration — to lay the foundations of a Polish-Czechoslovak confederation, a West Slav union based on strategic borders with Germany. The River Oder was being mentioned in popular publications as well as in diplomatic *pourparlers* for the first time. In the sense that Sikorski sought to make the East Central European region less vulnerable and dependent on the two mighty neighbours, his vision was not totally different from the older Polish concepts. It differed, however, from Beneš' concept of a Czechoslovak-Polish regional organization, being really a transition to a wider grouping in which Soviet Russia would either participate or over which it would extend its sponsorship. For all his criticism of the anti-Czechoslovak pre-war policies, Sikorski did not envisage

Beneš as a mediator between Poland and Russia. For all his willingness to approach the Polish-Russian problem in a conciliatory and flexible fashion, Sikorski was at no point willing to make Poland a client state of the USSR. It was easier to criticize past policies than to face similar predicaments oneself.

While the Polish-Czechoslovak *rapprochement* was making slow progress and the notion of a regional federation was gaining British, and more vaguely American support, the German invasion of Russia suddenly placed the latter at the vortex of world affairs. The possibility of a German-Soviet war had been ruled out by Zaleski, and although there were a few dissenting voices, the Polish government was not politically ready for the new situation which arose in June 1941. The foreign ministry's circular of August 1940 had indicated that should Russia find herself in war with Germany, the Poles may have to revise some of their attitudes toward the USSR. But the pre-condition for a re-establishment of relations would be Soviet recognition of pre-war borders, the evacuation of occupied Polish lands, and the creation of Polish units in the east under Polish sovereign command. These views had not been further elaborated, and when Sikorski addressed the Soviet Union on the radio his speech was not thought through and his overtures to Russia most vaguely phrased. It appeared that the general preferred that Britain take the initiative to mediate a Soviet-Polish settlement. This may well have been a mistake.

The Sikorski-Maisky pact of July 30, signed largely under British guidance and pressure, constituted, together with the subsequent Sikorski visit to Moscow, the crucial phase of Polish wartime diplomacy. The initial Soviet conditions — emphasis on ethnic Poland, wartime cooperation through a Polish national committee in Russia, and Polish troops there led by a Soviet-appointed commander — were intentionally tough to leave room for bargaining. The Soviet refusal to recognize the Riga frontier was, however, unshakeable. Sikorski saw the necessity for an accord, but he strove to obtain a Soviet repudiation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop line (restoring the *status quo ante*), a release of Polish deportees who would provide the backbone of an army, and the



establishment of a good working relationship important for the realization of the Central European regional projects. The British encouraged Sikorski and did their best to eliminate Zaleski from the negotiation, who opposed a vague accord deprived of iron-clad British guarantees. At Polish prompting Britain declared that she did not recognize any territorial changes since September 1939, but also made it clear that she guaranteed no specific borders.

Under these circumstances the final text of the Soviet-Polish pact represented probably the maximum that was achievable, although Zaleski, Seyda, and General Kazimierz Sosnkowski left the government in protest. Russia was obliged to recognize Poland (which Molotov had relegated to the dustbin of history in 1939) and annul the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact. She established diplomatic relations with the Sikorski government, freed the deportees, although under the guise of an 'amnesty', and permitted the creation of a Polish army in Russia under Polish command. The crucial frontier issue, however, remained *de facto* open. While the Poles insisted that the repudiation of the Soviet-Nazi pact meant a return to the pre-1939 conditions, the Soviets claimed that their right to retain the eastern Polish provinces was derived from plebiscites they had held there shortly after their occupation. At this moment the contested land was occupied by the Germans, but the citizenship status of its inhabitants (deported to Russia) became the focal point of friction.

Tacitly, each side admitted the possibility of frontier corrections. Sikorski mentioned it in private conversations with the British and Americans, as well as with his closest associates. But he insisted that talks on the subject could not be held before the end of the war. This made sense on Polish constitutional grounds, and it corresponded to Sikorski's hope that Soviet Russia would by then be exhausted and not in actual control of the contested territories. Sikorski's strategy, as he outlined it to the western allies, included an invasion of the continent from the Balkans and from the north so that East Central Europe would be liberated by the British and the Americans.

The Poles mistakenly assumed that Moscow was willing to postpone any territorial decisions, and Sikorski was taken

aback when Stalin confronted him in December 1941 with a proposal to talk about this very issue. Was Sikorski wrong in refusing an exchange which at least may have acquainted the Poles with Stalin's ideas of a settlement? Did the Soviet dictator intend, as Sikorski told the British later, to push Poland westward? Or did the general try in an oblique way to probe the British feelings regarding Poland's acquisition of East Prussia, Gdańsk and Upper Silesia? One thing seems clear: Sikorski began to give more serious thought to possible concessions in the east and acquisitions in the west, but instead of keeping direct communication with Stalin, he sought to strengthen his position by British and American backing. This too may have been a tactical error, for the backing was singularly ineffective, and it may have increased Stalin's suspicions of Polish-British collusion. Sikorski's renewed efforts to accelerate the talks with Czechoslovakia, and to consolidate his position as an unofficial leader of the smaller allies, were also seen as a means to strengthen his hand *vis-à-vis* Russia.

Sikorski had good reason to be concerned with Russian diplomatic moves. In negotiations with Anthony Eden for a Soviet-British alliance, the Russians demanded an explicit recognition of their 1941 borders (with the exclusion, at Eden's request, of the Polish-Soviet sector). They clearly wanted to have their conquests legitimized by the west. Simultaneously Moscow was looking askance on any plans of a regional federation in East Central Europe which would not be under its influence. Ambassador Bogomolov sharply protested against an interview of the acting foreign minister, Raczyński, in which the latter had stressed the independent role of the future federation and expressed an interest in Lithuanian participation. Sikorski accused the diplomat of acting like the Russian ambassadors-proconsuls in Warsaw at the time of Poland's partitions. By July, the USSR conveyed its disapproval of the Polish-Czechoslovak confederation; this amounted to a veto and Beneš accepted it. Meanwhile Soviet-Polish friction, revolving around the deportees and General Anders' army created in Russia, led to the evacuation of the Polish troops to Iran in April and June 1942.

Sikorski sought to enlist the support of the United States

for his idea of a regional federation and against any Soviet-British territorial deals during the war. His two trips to Washington, in March and December 1942, however, were not very successful. True, it seemed at first that Sikorski had scored by persuading Washington to pressure Britain against a Russian alliance with territorial provisions. Yet, this temporary convergence of American and Polish positions did not stem from identical assumptions. Rooseveltian wait-and-see policy amounted to evading issues; the warm reception of Sikorski in no way meant an endorsement of his line. Washington's tactics of postponing unpleasant matters, and failing to send clear signals to Moscow, were really operating to Poland's disadvantage.

Did Sikorski realize that? His mood oscillated between depression and exaggerated hopes. Roosevelt was making it clear to the British that if the Poles eventually received East Prussia and perhaps something in Silesia in exchange for the lands lost to Russia, they would still gain rather than lose. It was up to the great powers, he said, to impose their decisions; Roosevelt had no intention of haggling with the Poles. In these circumstances the memoranda, which Sikorski brought with him to Washington, were of somewhat academic interest. Whether he envisaged the Oder-Neisse rivers as future borders of Poland or as a 'security line', comparable to the Rhine in the west, was of no immediate importance. The support which Sikorski needed in Washington he did not obtain; Polish diplomacy was increasingly on the defensive.

The British saw more clearly than the Americans that Moscow was trying to force the Poles to accept the Curzon Line (it was better to refer to this than to the Molotov-Ribbentrop line) under the threat of working against General Sikorski's Cabinet and of making the position of Poles in Russia impossible. London envisaged a strategy of proposing (jointly with the United States) to Russia a territorial settlement which would leave Lwów on the Polish side and to which the Polish government might have to acquiesce under protest. Poland's independence would be preserved at the cost of territorial sacrifices. Here were the beginnings of a policy which Churchill would pursue in the remaining war years.

Did Sikorski contemplate a direct approach to Russia? In October a well-known Polish journalist, Ksawery Pruszyński, appealed in a highly unorthodox article for a bold decision which could affect the life of the nation for centuries to come. He argued for a break with the five hundred years of the Polish past by giving up the east, turning to Szczecin and Wrocław and resuming the heritage of the Piasts. The Polish leader was hardly in a position to contemplate such a drastic move. Even if he wanted to, Sikorski was not powerful enough to act against the overwhelming opposition of his countrymen. And who could guarantee that Moscow would not treat the concessions as a first step in the direction of transforming the Polish government into its tool? The historically-minded Poles could recall that even the pro-Russian stooges of the Targowica confederation had been cheated by Catherine II. Would any, except a communist government, provide guarantees of full obedience and loyalty to Moscow?

The revelations in mid-April 1943 of the Katyn massacre provoked an insufficiently guarded Polish reaction which the Soviet Union promptly used to break off relations with the Sikorski government. From now on Moscow's tactics would consist in demanding as a price for a resumption of diplomatic relations a transformation of the London cabinet, while simultaneously opposing to it a rival Polish communist centre. Indeed, a Union of Polish Patriots had come into existence in Russia, and it extended its political umbrella over General Berling's Polish division sponsored by the USSR. As for a Communist vision of Poland in Europe, it was provided by a leading ideologist, Alfred Lampe, who wrote that the new pro-Soviet Polish state would be bordered by the Oder in the west and the Curzon Line in the east.

The Katyn affair was followed quickly by two other blows: the arrest by the Gestapo of the commander of the Home Army, and the death of General Sikorski himself in a plane crash at Gibraltar. The cards were heavily stacked against Poland when the Government passed into the hands of the peasant leader, Stanisław Mikołajczyk, whose experience and standing were not comparable to Sikorski's. The supreme command went to General Sosnkowski, who

sharply differed from the premier. A second period of Polish wartime diplomacy began, and there is much to be said for Terry's point that 'in retrospect it was Sikorski's failure and not Mikołajczyk's that marked the end of hopes for a genuinely independent and democratic Poland.'<sup>28</sup>

The principal task facing Mikołajczyk's diplomacy was the re-establishment of relations with Russia. To do so, the Poles had to rely on British efforts and try to enlist American backing. They also sought to use the Home Army (the largest underground in occupied Europe) as a political asset and as a means of building a bridge to Russia. Ambassador Romer had made overtures in that sense to Stalin (before the breach); Mikołajczyk discussed it with Roosevelt; the government argued this point with the Foreign Office. All in vain. It was a tragic paradox that the Home Army did not really play a major role in allied military planning; for the west it was geographically remote, for Russia politically inconvenient.

The British approach, increasingly based on the formula of Polish territorial concessions in exchange for internal independence, could only be pursued in violation of commitments to the Poles. Respecting Mikołajczyk's opposition to a discussion of territorial questions at the Moscow conference in October 1943 Eden could do nothing. As for Secretary Hull, he regarded the Polish issue as a 'piddling little thing' unworthy of inter-allied debates. Mikołajczyk kept arguing that Soviet ambitions did not stop at the Curzon Line. Moreover, while the British and the Americans seemed inclined to condone Polish losses in the east, they were vague about compensation in the west. Churchill was growing impatient with the Poles. He opined that 'nations who are found unable to defend their country must accept a reasonable measure of guidance from those who had rescued them and who offer them the prospect of sure freedom and independence'.<sup>29</sup> Whether Churchill was as sanguine about the prospect as he sounded or not, he was determined to impose a settlement on the Poles.

The Tehran Conference saw the application of Churchill's ideas. The story is too well known for me to dwell upon it here. The importance of Tehran is greater than that of the more publicized Yalta, which really saw the closing of the

deal. At Tehran, Churchill suggested to Stalin that Poland be moved westward, but he made no effort to salvage Lwów for the Poles and agreed to hand over to Russia the part of East Prussia with Königsberg, which thus far seemed destined for Poland. On his return to London he subjected the Mikołajczyk government to relentless pressure to accept this arrangement. Acting as mediator he sought a formula allowing the government in London to save face, but his appeal to Stalin met with a brutal rebuff. The Soviets saw no need for a British mediation. Searching for a Polish Beneš who would endorse a pro-Soviet line, they made some overtures to Mikołajczyk himself. His position was becoming hopeless as the Soviets, advancing into purely Polish lands, now established a rival Lublin Committee in July 1944 as a *de facto* government of Poland.

Mikołajczyk still hoped to gain the support of Washington, but Roosevelt, while showing interest in the Polish dilemma, was not going to do anything concrete. In fact he reassured Stalin about Mikołajczyk's visit to Washington. The Russians were by now quite certain that the Grand Alliance would not founder on the Polish rock.

Mikołajczyk's tragic journey to Moscow, undertaken on Churchill's insistence, coincided with the outbreak of the Warsaw uprising, the most dramatic and controversial event of the war as far as the Poles were concerned. Again, there is no need to dwell on it in this presentation. Suffice it to say that politically the rising was aimed at demonstrating Polish determination to be masters in their own house. Diplomatically it was to prevent the allies from disposing of the Polish question and following exclusively their own interests. Once again, as after the Sikorski-Maisky pact, the Poles mistakenly assumed that the Russians would play the game according to the prevailing rules. They did not imagine that Moscow would dare to defy the west by refusing landing rights to its planes flying rescue missions to Warsaw, and to delay the Red Army's advance until the virtual destruction of Warsaw. As Kennan saw it, this was a challenge and a test of western determination, which the west failed to pass. In these conditions the political activity of the Polish government in exile was becoming limited to a refusal to sign its own death warrant. Fighting stubbornly against Churchill's

brutal pressure Mikołajczyk went through the humiliating experience of another Moscow trip in October without achieving anything. His remaining hopes were pinned on the United States. If an American guarantee could be obtained for Poland within her new borders, which Polish communists and Russia had accepted on August 27, he could still try to overcome the opposition of the Polish Cabinet. But Washington was unwilling to assume any real obligations, and on November 24, 1944 Mikołajczyk resigned. Addressing a British audience shortly thereafter, he said that he had not been asked to compromise but surrender; this he could not do.

The new government, headed by the veteran socialist, Tomasz Arciszewski, with Adam Tarnowski as foreign minister, can best be described as the Government of National Protest. Indeed, what else could it do but to proclaim loudly that Poland would not capitulate to Stalin as she had not capitulated to Hitler. If the possibilities of diplomatic manoeuvre of the Mikołajczyk Cabinet had been extremely limited, those of the Arciszewski Cabinet were nil. The west was concentrating its efforts on expanding the base of the Soviet-sponsored government in Poland by the addition of Mikołajczyk and a few other non-communists. It was placing its hopes on future free elections. In mid-July 1945 the allies recognized the so-called Provisional Government of National Unity and withdrew its recognition of the Arciszewski government. The wartime chapter of Polish diplomacy was over.

Mikołajczyk, and even Sikorski, who had decisively shaped Polish foreign policy, were not entirely free agents. The substitute parliament may not have counted for much, and Sikorski dominated the Cabinet; yet the Polish leaders could never act in a way that would be at total variance with the national outlook and values. The impact of public opinion is, of course, harder to assess in wartime than under 'normal' conditions, and even more difficult in a divided and occupied country. There were far-ranging differences among Poles at home and abroad, including the American Polonia with its pro- and anti-Sikorski wings. But one thing seems clear: most Poles could not comprehend why, as loyal allies and the first victim of Nazi aggression, they

should come out of the war penalized and diminished. Why should Soviet Russia, which had acted in collusion with Hitler and inflicted grave hardships on the Poles, be rewarded with territorial conquests and hegemony in East Central Europe? Why should an alien ideological system be imposed upon Poland? Was this what the Polish troops, many of them hailing from the eastern confines, were fighting for at Monte Cassino, Falaise or Arnhem? A surrender to Russia would have been regarded as a betrayal of national trust.

Were the Polish leaders guilty of wishful thinking, and did they belatedly realize the hopelessness of Poland's situation? This may be true for Sikorski, but the case is not absolutely certain. Both Sikorski and, to a lesser extent, Mikołajczyk, probably tried to appear more optimistic than they were, and in that sense may have been misleading their countrymen, especially in the homeland. Would greater openness have been preferable or possible? The gap between Polish goals and the existing reality was widening and most people were not fully aware of it.

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Are there any 'lessons' to be drawn from these thirty years of Polish diplomacy? Even if one disbelieves the maxim *historia magistra vitae*, broad generalizations and tentative assessments of aims and achievements (and failures) are in order. The story reminds us of the obvious, namely that there is no substitute for power in international relations, although we must not exclude spiritual factors from the concept of power. It was natural that the Polish First World War goal of independence be conceived in terms of power. Situated at European crossroads Poland could not have abstained from great power politics even if she wished to do so. Did the Riga borders (which, incidentally, all Poles finally accepted) contain the germs of a future conflict with Russia? Even if one agrees that they did, one can argue that without these eastern lands, annexed by the USSR in 1939, Poland would have had a small chance to reach Oder and Neisse, which the Soviets and, largely, the west viewed as compensation. Were the policies of balance and alliances in

the inter-war period based on false assumptions? Their critics have failed to show convincingly the existence of other alternatives. Sikorski's scheme of a regional East Central European confederation based on the Warsaw-Prague axis was perfectly logical and advantageous from a Polish and European viewpoint, yet Polish diplomacy lacked the means, especially in view of relative western indifference, of overcoming Soviet opposition to it. Would a tripartite Soviet-Czechoslovak-Polish pact have constituted a viable alternative? Judging by the fate of the Soviet-Czechoslovak 1943 treaty, which became in fact the first link in the chain of Soviet alliances with the region, such a pact would have been counter-productive. In the final analysis, the western powers aimed at a post-war world based on cooperation with Russia and they were unwilling to compromise this objective by confronting Moscow over the Polish rights. The argument, advanced by the Poles, that placating Russia at their expense was another form of appeasement, dangerous for the future, was met with the accusation that the Poles were jeopardizing the post-war order. Obviously Polish diplomacy was not in a position to prevail.

An examination of Polish diplomatic efforts over the relatively short period of thirty years leads us towards the conclusion that the real source of Polish defeats must be sought in the past. As Henryk Wereszycki has put it, 'Poland since the beginning of the eighteenth century has oscillated between freedom and captivity.'<sup>30</sup> Unable to recover her former status of a regional power, Poland has not found, or been allowed to find, a proper place in the rapidly developing and changing twentieth-century world. Diplomacy is but a composite and a reflection of multiple factors; geography, demography, economic potential, prevailing ideology, political culture, national character, religious beliefs. Diplomacy, however, is also autonomous in the sense that it is related to the prevailing international system. In our case, three such systems existed: the disintegrating pre-1914 balance successfully challenged by the Wilsonian and revolutionary ideology; the inter-war system of Versailles and its decomposition, and finally the transition age of the Second World War pointing toward a future bi-polar constellation. Whether

and how Polish diplomacy was in or out of tune with the international systems could be the object of a separate paper. Here we can observe that even in that respect the Polish domestic component weighed heavily on the country's diplomacy. Operating from a position of material weakness and spiritual strength, the Polish nation could neither achieve its goals, nor surrender its identity. The conduct of foreign policy was affected by, and reflected in, these constants. The Poles could have done better on occasions had they shown more patience, understanding, perseverance, and unity. Indeed, many prominent Poles have criticized these national shortcomings. One important fact, however, should not be forgotten. In 1914 a united and independent Poland appeared to most people a dream; to foreigners Poland was a chapter of the past, closed and forgotten. Thirty years later not even Russia seeking territorial expansion and domination seriously thought of eradicating Poland from the map of Europe. Present-day Poland belongs to the category of states without sovereignty, but the state does exist and its significance from the point of view of national survival must not be underestimated.

We do not know what the future will bring. But I strongly believe that the Poles, pondering the story of the thirty years of diplomatic efforts, will remember one goal which has been tenaciously pursued and defended: independence.

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